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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 000668

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SENV](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#) [SETTLEMENTS](#) [ISRAELI](#) [PALESTINIAN](#) [AFFAIRS](#)

SUBJECT: HOUSING MINISTER BOIM DISCUSSES OUTPOSTS, SETTLEMENTS, AND SEPARATION BARRIER WITH THE AMBASSADOR

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) Summary: In a February 8 meeting with the Ambassador, Housing and Construction Minister Ze'ev Boim said that the GOI would evacuate outposts because Israel promised the USG that it would do so under the road map, and because outposts are unauthorized and Israel is a country that follows the rule of law. Boim doubted, however, that the GOI would remove any outposts before the elections on March 28 because it is not the "right time" to take tough steps from a political point of view. He acknowledged that the GOI is talking to the YESHA leadership about future evacuations of outposts, and said that this line of communication is important because the YESHA Council can positively or negatively influence how well future evacuations go. Boim told the Ambassador that he would continue to approve tenders for construction in the settlement blocs, and that the Ministry of Defense is currently undertaking a study to determine what the future needs of the settlers living in those settlements are. He said the GOI may expand the municipal boundaries of settlements to take into account the growth needs of those populations. Boim claimed that the separation barrier would be complete by mid-2007. End summary.

Outpost Removals: Yes, But
Not Before the Elections

2. (C) Housing and Construction Minister Ze'ev Boim, who also serves as agriculture minister, told the Ambassador on February 8 that he is unsure whether there will be further dismantling of outposts before the elections. He explained that it is not the "right time" to take tough steps on outposts from a political point of view, and admitted that in August 2005 GOI officials had asked the High Court to let them wait to demolish the nine permanent houses in Amona outpost until after the elections. Boim said, however, that as former deputy defense minister, he has been deeply involved in the government's policy on outposts, and assured the Ambassador that the GOI is ready to dismantle them in the future for two reasons. The first is that, from a political perspective, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon promised the USG and President Bush that the GOI would evacuate outposts, and the GOI will fulfill this commitment. The second reason, according to Boim, is that from an internal Israeli perspective, the outposts are "constructed against all (Israeli) laws," and Israel is a country that follows the rule of law. Boim said Israelis should ask themselves whether they want to live in a society where some people break the rules, and asked rhetorically, "What kind of society and culture is that?" He emphasized that Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert is very determined to act against outposts in the future, as demonstrated at Amona, and his policy is clear.

3. (C) Boim remarked that, on one hand, dismantling outposts in the future should be easier after the implementation of Gaza disengagement because the GOI "succeeded without bloodshed." He said that Israelis understand that the government is determined and has the capability to evacuate outposts. On the other hand, however, future evacuations will be more difficult because the settlers' resistance in the West Bank will be tougher. For these settlers, he explained, there is no difference between a "legal" settlement and an illegal outpost, and for them it is a question of "to be or not to be?" because once they see that the GOI has the determination to remove outposts, they will assume that the GOI is prepared to bring down "legal" settlements as well, and will step up their resistance activities.

4. (C) The Ambassador asked whether reports that Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni is secretly talking to settlers on further removals of outposts are true, and Boim acknowledged that there are GOI contacts with the YESHA Council. He said that these talks are important because the YESHA Council "still controls in a way" how other settlers behave, and therefore can positively or negatively influence how well future evacuations go. Boim commented that while the settler youth may not believe in the YESHA leadership, the majority of other settlers still obey and follow them, so it is important for the GOI to maintain these lines of communication. He said that in his and Olmert's opinion,

however, the GOI should talk to the settlers in a frank way, "not saying one thing but meaning another." He explained that the settlers should know what the Israeli government's policy is, underscoring that Olmert's February 7 interview on Channel 12 outlined the principles that would guide Israeli demands regarding a final agreement:

-- a free, independent Palestinian state with borders fixed after negotiations;

-- maintaining the most important settlement blocs for the sake of Israel's security: Ariel, Gush Etzion, Ma'ale Adumim, and a united Jerusalem;

-- and restricting Palestinian access to the Jordan Valley as strategic protection against the (potential) external "Arab threat."

Boim added that there are no details now on the exact points that Olmert or others are contemplating for the border, and that this would wait until Israel and the Palestinians reach that particular phase in negotiations.

We Plan More Construction
in the Settlement Blocs

15. (C) In response to the Ambassador's question on whether the GOI's policy of building in the settlement blocs would continue despite its road map commitment, Boim acknowledged that it would, and informed the Ambassador that the Ministry of Defense (MOD) is currently doing a study to determine what the "right size" of a settlement's master plan should be, to include the possibility of expanding each settlement's municipal boundaries if need be. He explained that the MOD is trying to determine what "natural borders" each settlement should have for demographic purposes -- new families, children becoming adults and wanting to raise their own families in that settlement. Boim said that the GOI should plan "the municipal borders not according to the last line of houses in a settlement," but taking into account growth and the needs of the (Israeli) people. The Ambassador asked whether Boim would revive a previous practice of providing the Embassy advance warning -- before publication -- of any tenders that the GOI plans to issue, and Boim tentatively agreed. He said that his ministry has a list of future plans for houses it plans to build in certain settlements, and that he is going to meet with Olmert in approximately ten days to show him the Ministry's plan. He said he would get Olmert's approval to pass the list to Post.

Separation Barrier Done in mid-2007

16. (C) In response to the Ambassador's question on the timing of the completion of the separation barrier, Boim replied that the GOI would have a continuous, fully operational fence from Bet Shean in the north to Metzudat Yehuda in the south in six to seven weeks, with the exception of the settlement blocs. He said that the entire separation barrier should be complete by mid-2007. Boim claimed that the fact that the barrier is not complete around Jerusalem is a problem because all of the six suicide bombers that got into Green Line Israel in 2005 entered through Jerusalem in private taxis. He asserted that the barrier around the Ariel bloc is important for security, but also for strategic reasons in a final agreement with the Palestinians because 60 percent of Israelis receive their water from the Mountain Aquifer that lies mostly under this bloc. (Note: The Mountain Aquifer underlies almost the entire West Bank. End note.) He acknowledged that the GOI is having problems getting the settlers to agree to the separation barrier in the Gush Etzion bloc, but the government continues to try to convince them nevertheless.

17. (C) Comment: We appreciate Boim's candor, but his comments on GOI plans to continue building in existing settlements suggest friction in this area will continue in the event of a Kadima election victory. End comment.

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JONES